SHAPES OF CLAY

SEPTEMBER · 1927

GLADDING, McBEAN & CO.

Whence is thy learning? Hath thy toil
O'er books consumed the midnight oil?

—Gay

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Los Angeles City and County Schools

HISTORY has no counterpart for the growth of Los Angeles, and in the epic narrative of that growth the development of the public-school system would require a separate book. In the year 1835 Los Angeles had one school and one hundred pupils. In 1860 there were two schools and less than five hundred pupils. At the present time there are 333 public schools, with an enrollment of 295,760 pupils. There are 8989 teachers, with an annual salary roll of $16,721,238. During the last twenty months the Los Angeles Board of Education has expended more than one million dollars a month on land, buildings, and equipment. It is amazing but accurately true that in the last seven years public-school growth in Los Angeles has equaled the growth of the previous seventy years. The growth of private schools has also been outstanding in rapidity and importance.

Obviously the Los Angeles Board of Education has been confronted with a task of herculean proportions. Fortunately there has been a strong public opinion to support the board's efforts, and so it is that in physical equipment and teaching personnel the Los Angeles public schools have a very special distinction.

The excellence of school architecture on the Pacific Coast has been noted already in SHAPES OF CLAY. Architects reverence the lamp of learn-

ing, and when permitted to do so, give of their best when designing a school. Up and down the Pacific Coast, during the last decade or so, the architects have been encouraged to surpass themselves in school architecture. In Los Angeles one may study this Pacific Coast school architecture in a spirit of untroubled admiration.

Augustus Caesar boasted that he found a Rome of brick and left a Rome of marble. The Los Angeles architects of today may justly pride themselves on having found their schools of wood and transformed them to brick. It is a real achievement. The application of brick in accordance with the finest traditions of architecture is exemplified in Los Angeles schools more widely and more strikingly than anywhere else on the Pacific Coast.

In very ancient times brick architecture was localized in great river valleys of alluvial deposits, whereas stone architecture flourished in the vicinity of mountains and rocky formations. "No better example of such a principle could be given," says Professor Giovannoni, an eminent authority on this subject, "than that of the two oldest civilizations in the world, the Egyptian and the Chaldean. In Egypt the rocky borders of the Nile valley offered a material for the most monumental stone architecture, while clay along the river banks was made into sun-baked bricks for the humbler constructions. In Chaldea, on the other hand, that is, in the immense plains traversed by the Tigris and the Euphrates, the art and technique of burned clay was developed and applied more fully, and attained gradually to a marvelous degree of perfection, until it was used not only as constructive material but also as a means for the transmission of human knowledge."

This localized use of building materials has been a recurring phenomenon in comparatively modern as well as in very ancient times. The grand exception during ancient ages was while the Roman Empire maintained its magnificent system of communications and its powerfully centralized government. In her monumental building operations Rome used what material she pleased, no matter how heavy might be the cost of carrying it, even to the far distant borders of her dominion. The same condition applies, for reasons that will immediately suggest themselves, to the world of today.

Materials like terra-cotta and brick are used everywhere without any other limitation than the purse or fancy of the builder and the taste of the architect. And with the renaissance of architecture, which is surely a definite feature of this present day, the untrammeled use of brick both structurally and decoratively has once more widened the circle of the architectural art to that amplitude that was characteristic of the very best periods of the past.

Brick architecture was fully appreciated in ancient Rome, as we know from Vitruvius and other witnesses; it was revived during the Middle Ages; recaptured its position of eminence during the Renaissance in the Low Countries and North Italy; flourished too in Tudor England; and knew its old glories once more in that Georgian period that so deeply affected our own Colonial design. Then brick lost ground for a long time, happily to recover it in our own day. Builders and students have awakened with a thrill of delight to the splendor of beauty that abides in brick properly applied to buildings.

The effects of delicate color that may be evoked from brick, its variety of textural charm, and its subtle simplicity in the bodying forth of ornament—these advantages have raised it from the lowly position it too long occupied, that of Cinderella in the kiln family.

Where massiveness alone is the architectural end in view, brick yields readily to the demands made upon it. But it is the decorative resourcefulness of brick that particularly engages the interest of the architect at present. This decorative resourcefulness of brick, in common with its structural dignity, is illustrated in a diversity of forms in the pictures of Los Angeles schools presented here. The Los Angeles architects have placed full reliance upon the wide range of its colors and textures. By their recognition of the ease with which delightful reticulations may be presented to gladden the studied sobriety of great walls, they have further acclaimed their enthusiasm for brick as a tractable and sympathetic material.

In the photographs presented here there are some charming combinations of terra-cotta and brick. For this it may be said that the history of architecture provides the most distinguished precedent. The Romans early

I · Belmont High School, Los Angeles. Architectural Department, Los Angeles Board of Education, architects. Los Angeles school architecture accords with the best practice in the application of brick. There is splendid medieval precedent for this rose decoration, and for the treatment of entrance and window openings. The brick is Belmont Rug, supplied by Gladding, McBean & Co. The tile is our Varicolor Granada.

II · Lafayette Junior High School, Los Angeles. Architectural Department, Los Angeles Board of Education, architects. For this auditorium, inside and out, Gladding, McBean & Co.'s Tan Ruffle brick was chosen with most happy results. The brick arches and columns have been handled with special lightness and grace, and reticulated work was introduced with careful restraint. Ours, too, is the roof tile.

discovered the harmonious relationship of these two materials and were fond of uniting them. The Renaissance gloriously revived this ancient union. But precedent is not needed to justify the combination as it is found in these Los Angeles school buildings. The result tells its own story of beauty. There is here a special vivacity in the effect achieved, a sense, as it were, of brick gravity yielding in cheerful good-nature to the importunities of terra-cotta gayety.

The architects of Los Angeles, in common with their colleagues elsewhere on the Pacific Coast, acknowledge without constraint the influence that Gladding, McBean & Co. has exercised for many years upon the development of face brick. This Company has a record of accomplishment in face brick comparable with what it has done to forward the merged beauty and utility of terra-cotta, roof tile, and decorative tile. Its chemists and its kilns have brought forth for the use of the architect an irresistible series of colors and textures, and of course they are far from having exhausted the potentialities of the art. With each new advance there has been, as a spur to further endeavor, the understanding application of the product to beautiful structures, none of them more significant than our Pacific Coast schools.

The artistic value of brick surfaces is in their texture and color. Texture produces tone, first, by the joints, second, by the surfaces of the individual bricks. The most artistic brick wall displays slight irregularities in tone. . . . The finer brick wall will be that in which the individual bricks have slight unevenness of texture and the shade of one brick is not identical with that of its fellows. . . . Brickwork is essentially a mosaic with the horizontal joints dominant. Its scale is set out by the patterns used, but chiefly by the size of the units. . . . There looms ahead an era of architectural development in brick that will not only compare favorably with any traditional period of the past in matters of design, but far exceed it in rich color harmonies of wall surface, if the material available is artistically handled in harmony with its fundamental character.

ENGLISH PRECEDENT FOR MODERN BRICKWORK

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WHO was the first to formulate the theory of depreciation? Was it not Vitruvius, the Roman authority on architecture, whose great book was written during the reign of Augustus? In his chapter on walls Vitruvius writes:

"Those walls which are built of soft and smooth-looking stone, will not last long. Hence, when valuations are made of external walls, we must not put them at their original cost; but having found, from the register, the number of lettings they have gone through, we must deduct for every year of their age an eightieth part of such cost, and set down the remainder or balance as their value, inasmuch as they are not calculated to last more than eighty years."

Is not this the earliest enunciation of the theory of "straight-line" depreciation?

Vitruvius goes on to say without qualification that there is no depreciation in walls of brick, "which," to quote, "whilst they stand upright, are always valued at their first cost." He had a particular admiration for walls of brick, and justified it on the ground that kings, unhampered by considerations of cost and in a position to choose the best, often built their royal structures of brick. He instances the palace of Croesus, king of Lydia, and that of Mausolus, king of Halicarnassus. "The walls," he says, "are of brick and remarkably sound at the present day." As Croesus flourished some five hundred, and Mausolus some three hundred years before Vitruvius, this is high testimony to the durability of face brick.

In the case of Mausolus, Vitruvius makes the point that not only was he above suspicion of an unkingly economy, but that actually his partiality to brick sprang from a fine taste in architecture. For did he not rear that Mausoleum that was one of the seven wonders of the world?

"If therefore [says Vitruvius] kings of such great power did not despise brick buildings, those who, from their great revenue and spoils in war, can afford the expense not only of squared and rough stone, but even of marble buildings, must not despise brick structures when well executed."

Obviously Vitruvius was "sold" on brick. Was he also taking a sly dig at Augustus, who preferred marble?

* * *

The beautiful structure pictured on the cover of this issue of SHAPES OF CLAY is the High School at Santa Monica, California, for which Allison & Allison were the architects. The brick is Gladding, McBean & Co.'s Red Ruffle, the effect of which is here charmingly enriched by its living association with vines, shrubs, and trees.

* * *

In our June issue (the Hawaiian Islands number), one very charming home was described as the "Gustave Schuman Residence, Manoa Valley, Emory & Webb, Architects." This was an error. The picture showed the residence of George F. Lake, for which Herbert Cohen was architect. The roof was of Gladding, McBean & Co.'s Small Spanish Tile.

III · James A. Foshay Junior High School, Los Angeles. Hunt & Burns, architects. This junior high school displays that "smiling front" which is not without its psychological influence upon the youngsters who gather by hundreds to enter its pleasant portals. Its Belmont Rug face brick is a product of Gladding, McBean & Co. kilns.

IV · Conaty Memorial High School, Los Angeles. Albert C. Martin, architect. Terra-cotta and face brick have been most harmoniously combined in this colorful front of a Roman Catholic school. Such combinations are in the true tradition of brick architecture. Gladding, McBean & Co. supplied both materials. The brick is Old Rose Ruffle.

V · (*above*) James A. Garfield High School, Los Angeles. George Lindsey, architect. Gladding, McBean & Co. supplied Old Rose brick for this beautiful structure; also Varicolor Granada roof tile.

(*below*) Thomas Edison Junior High School, Los Angeles. Walker & Eisen, architects. Our Tan Rug brick was selected for the masonry of this great school building. We also supplied the roof tile.

I - (*above*) Robert Louis Stevenson Junior High School, Los Angeles. Hunt & Burns, architects. Our Belmont Rug was the brick used here. This spirited treatment shows the tractability of brick.

elow) Watts Junior High School, Los Angeles. Architectural Department, L. A. Board of Education, architects. Gladding, McBean & Co.'s Tan Ruffle was used for exterior and interior. Ours, too, the Large Spanish roof tile.

VII · Washington Grammar School, Culver City, California. Roth & Parker, architects. For this entranceway of classic simplicity Gladding, McBean & Co. supplied the terra-cotta that stands out with such noble dignity against the serious background of brick masonry, the combination proving a most happy one of light and shade. Our Red Granada roof tile was used.

III · Beverly Vista School, Beverly Hills, Los Angeles. Gable & Wyant, architects. In the warm sunshine and unclouded sky of Beverly Hills, Old Rose Ruffle brick provides a congenial note of color delicately attuned to its environment of luxuriant growing things. This beautiful brick is a Gladding, McBean & Co. product. So is the roof tile.

IX *(above)* WARREN G. HARDING HIGH SCHOOL, Sawtelle, Los Angeles. Russell & Alpaugh, architects. Tan Ruffle brick produced by Gladding, McBean & Co. fully justifies its selection for investiture of this school.

(below) BENJAMIN FRANKLIN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, Long Beach, California. Anderson & Cline, architects. This is our Tan Rug brick. The roof tile is our Large Spanish and Large Mission.

(*above*) Eleanor Joy Toll School, Glendale, California. Alfred F. Priest, architect. A Tan Rug brick produced by Gladding, McBean & Co. clothes this large school in simple sincerity.

(*below*) Theodore Roosevelt School, Glendale, California. Alfred F. Priest, architect. Here terra-cotta was richly but sparingly used to lighten the seriousness of the Tan Rug brick. Both materials are ours.

XI · Madison School, Santa Monica, California. Francis D. Rutherford, architect. Here again brick and terra-cotta are found happily wedded in accordance with the Old World ritual of architecture. This terra-cotta, applied decoratively under the discipline of exquisite taste, was produced by Gladding, McBean & Co.

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This charming plaque, one of a series,
was modeled and executed in terra-cotta for the Ajo School
in Arizona. The bird of wisdom on the inside front cover was produced in
the same plastic medium for the same school. The architects
were Lescher, Kibbey & Mahoney of
Phoenix.

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